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ABSTRACT

Ideally teacher educators play a significant role in the initial empowerment of teachers as professionals. The level of success teacher educators have in this role reflects their own level of empowerment. Empowered teacher educators have a clear perception of the role of a teacher and of their own role as a teacher educator. To achieve empowerment requires overcoming fears of change or of discomfort that change may cause, coming to an understanding of the forces for change and the nature of the changes sought, grasping a sense of the diverse possibilities in teacher education through the literature and through listening to others, and reflecting on increasing understandings in order to reach some greater clarity about oneself as a teacher educator. An empowering strategy linked with the ongoing renewal and refinement of teacher education curriculum within institutions is proposed, based on collaboration, support and trust of each other, and a view of oneself not as a leader dispensing wisdom but as a partner in an ongoing process contributing to effective education. Teacher educators need to overcome obstacles to collaboration and begin to build bridges to others in the faculty, other faculties, students, teachers, schools, and beyond. (Contains 17 references.) (JDD)

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EMPOWERING TEACHER EDUCATORS: A PROCESS OF TRANSITION

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EMPOWERING TEACHER EDUCATORS: A PROCESS OF TRANSITION

Abstract

Ideally teacher educators play a significant role in the initial empowerment of teachers as professionals. The level of success teacher educators have in this role reflects their own level of empowerment. Initiating, maintaining and replenishing empowerment of teacher educators appears to be a neglected area in contemporary debate. In the present climate it is often assumed that those who can teach can educate teachers. The transition from the role of teacher to teacher educator may not be so simple, nor might all teacher educators be recruited from teaching.

In this paper an empowering strategy linked with the ongoing renewal and refinement of teacher education curriculum within institutions is proposed. Suggestions for the involvement of the whole range of teacher educators are made and critical debate from conference participants invited.

As a person who entered teacher education in the early seventies I have at times watched, and at other times, been involved in the comings and goings of initial teacher preparation. Until recently this was an easy task as, despite considerable debate, not much really came or went, not much really changed. This lack of change, indeed ongoing resistance to change is clearly portrayed by Erica McWilliam (1993: 123) who views the broad conceptualising of the content/process of preservice courses as fundamentally unaltered despite the demands of 'corporate federalism'.

In this paper I examine the need for empowerment or reimpowerment of teacher educators, what we need to do to be empowered, and suggest some strategies for achieving this goal.

The need for empowerment

Currently the climate for change is one of urgency. An increasing array of forces present challenges to teacher education and to teacher educators in our universities which, if not met appropriately and creatively, may well result in the bypassing of institution based initial teacher preparation in favour of school or work-place based teacher training. External forces press for change in the way we educate prospective teachers while our own institutions press for greater involvement in academic research, scholarship and service.

Groups legitimised by government, by statute and by the professions of teaching and teacher education are providing challenges that can no longer be ignored. Such challenges are represented by the *Competency Framework for Teaching* prepared by the National Project on the Quality of Teaching and Learning (1994); the *Framework for Desirable Attributes of Beginning Teachers* developed by the NSW Ministerial Advisory Council on Teacher Education and Quality Teaching (1994); The investigation by the National Office of Overseas Skills Recognition (1994) into the implementation of National Competency Standards in the professions, including their application to course content in universities; the setting up of the Australian Teaching Council with objects directly related to its intention to impact on all areas of teacher education; and, the whole quality assurance push being engineered by the Department of Employment, Education and Training through its many boards, councils and offices.

Teacher educators, many hired on the basis of their knowledge of teaching and their ability to teach are now expected to be researchers and take their place among other academics in the publish or perish stakes. This has not come easily for some. Yet a further difficulty is faced by new teacher educators. Many teacher educators are now being appointed at the lecturer A level with salaries below those of their teacher colleagues. New academics are facing the stress of conflicting pressures of a need for a collaborative and consultative approach to teacher education and the largely adversarial demands of research and scholarship in the publication, higher degree, tenure and promotion stakes. These pressures are not dissimilar from the pressures on experienced teacher educators who have ben required to also become mainstream academics. How do experienced teacher educators going through major change themselves assist new colleagues to make the transition to the new role of teacher educator?

The dynamic forces of change surrounding teacher educators are essentially disempowering. The knowledge and skills teacher educators have was valued, and worked, in the past. Much of it is perceived as of little value in the new world of initial teacher training.

So much change has occurred within school systems that many teacher educators may no longer know what is going on in schools. Those who do know are those school teachers who are actively engaged in the change process, rather than teacher educators. It is the teacher who knows about today's school. Is it any wonder that there is a call for teacher training to be facilitated by practitioners in the schools.

Gone is the vision of the initial preparation of an educated professional. Its place taken by a press for the preparation of a competent practitioner through a program that is increasingly being standardised in both content and structure in the quest for national teacher registration, uniformity and assured competence.

Clearly, experienced teacher educators are faced with a complete rethink of their roles. Such rethinking inevitably leads to the need for reskilling to enable teacher educators to play a meaningful role in the preparation of teachers for the future.

Just how relevant today is Carter's (1984:132) claim that teacher educators have 'a four-fold mission within the profession; transmitting skills, acting as gatekeepers, codifying basic knowledge, and providing service.'? Is this still a realistic mission in 1994?

What we need if we are experienced teacher educators is to engage in a process of renewal and if we are new to teacher education to engage in a process that assists us in making the transition from our previous role to that of teacher educator. What is clear is that we are all in the same boat. We simply boarded at different points in our career and thus bring different perceptions, enthusiasms and resistances with us. We might best then collaborate in a concurrent initiation and renewal process that I will refer to as empowerment and will apply to both new and experienced teacher educators. Just what is ti that we need to be empowered in or about? What do we nee to know? What new skills, attitudes and values do we need to explore?

What do we need to do to be empowered?

Empowerment comes with knowledge, with conscious awareness, commitment and action. In my view empowered teacher educators have a clear perception of the role of a teacher and of their own role as a teacher educator. This role is clearly grounded in a theoretical framework, value position or personal philosophy that the individual can articulate. It is a position that is reflected in the individual's own teaching and research and is informed by critical reflection on experience, theory and research.

I am drawn to the final paragraph of Kevin Harris' book *Teachers Constructing the Future* (1994: 115) in which he makes the following statement about what is possible for teachers. I apply it to the analysis of my position as a teacher educator. Harris says:

> to resist intellectual and managerial incorporation, to resist becoming mere managers of day-to-day activities imposed from beyond the school , and to redefine their role within the counterhegemonic practice. They can, through their discourse and interventionary practice in the ideological and political determinants of schooling, promote empowerment, autonomy and democracy. They can work towards extending human capacities and overcoming wastage of human resources and potential. They can. through determining and articulating the form and content of the curriculum and the purposes and conditions of schooling , and then through their classroom activity, take a leading role in constructing a future built on and celebrating the participatory power of the autonomous person - a future out children might face with some excitement rather than turn away from.

To achieve anything like this position I will need to: overcome any associated fears of change or of discomfort that change may cause; come to an understanding of the forces for change and the nature of the changes sought; grasp a sense of the diverse possibilities in teacher education through the literature and by listening to others; and, most importantly find time to reflect on my increasing understandings in order to reach some greater clarity about my personal perspective of myself as a teacher educator.

In such reflections I could benefit by applying the following insights from Smith & Cook (1992) to my reflections on my self as a teacher educator. They draw our attention to the uniqueness of each teacher's approach to teaching. This principle of uniqueness has a significant message for the design of our teacher education programs,

and, a profound message for our teacher educators. Clearly if we believe in this principle we need to make a

> serious attempt to come to terms with the unique elements of teaching and learning rather than an attempt to create 'homogenised' programs intended to equip all students with precisely the same competencies and skills and perhaps even the same concepts of teaching.(Smith & Cook, 1992: 144)

Increasingly the pressures of academic life are such that there is little time for reflection let alone the study of teacher education. So often teacher educators are aware of research in their own discipline and the teaching of that discipline but are not acquainted with the literature of teacher education as an area of study. Knowledge of the foundations of the curriculum for teacher education has at no time been as important as it is right now. Without this knowledge we are not able to critique the current agenda, to visualise meaningful alternatives or take a proactive role in steering the agenda. So many have come to teacher education as specialists in their discipline or field rather than as experts in the field of teacher education. In many senses some teacher educators have been inducted into their profession through what amounts to an apprenticeship. This has stood them well in the past. This is no longer the case.

Clearly there is a need for teacher educators to be reimpowered. The resistance of some in the face of such massive change is understandable. Even those of us wanting to keep up with the change find it a challenging process. Indeed it is so challenging that in the main we appear to have lost control of the agenda, of the ability to be proactive and strongly influence the direction of change. Deans of Teacher Education are actively engaged in the change process doing what they can to moderate the excesses of those forces that are driving the change. How then can we go about our own empowerment and at the same time support others in their empowerment process?

Strategies for empowerment

The overall thrust of the strategies I propose is one of collaboration. Much of what is academic life supports a competitive and at times adversarial approach. Renewal requires us to learn to work together as colleagues in at least a cooperative spirit. I believe that collaboration in all aspects of our lives enables us all to achieve far more than i]any of us can achieve alone. Collaboration builds the synergy so prized in effective and successful research and development teams around the world.

We need to learn to support and trust each other in this process. This is threatening to some. It may well be that we need to seek expert assistance in team building and conflict resolution to assist us to achieve our goals.

The substantive basis for collaboration exists all around us, in the literature and in the many documents we are faced with about so many teaching and teacher education areas, including the national curriculum profiles, teacher competencies and attributes, and quality assurance We need to build bridges to others in our faculty, to those in other faculties, to our students, to teachers, to schools and beyond. Here is the source of so much we need to understand and have for some reason often neglected in the past. For some this will be a new and challenging experience, for others it is already routine. We now need to see ourselves, not as leaders dispensing wisdom, but as partners in an ongoing process contributing to the effective education of ourselves and others.

A need exists for teacher educators to be critical of what is occurring in education, to contribute to the debate in a considered and measured way. We can only do this from a base that is informed. Some recent literature that provides a quick kaleidoscope of teacher education issues for anyone beginning this process may be useful. Recent

changes are chronicled and critiqued, for example, by Knight and Lingard (1993) in their paper *Dis/counting teacher education: The Beazley Papers* and elsewhere. The diversity of opinion about just where we are in teacher education in Australia has been presented in Chris Perry's (1994) summary of Radio National's Education Report March sessions devoted to a discussion with 'various luminaries within teacher education about their perceptions of the current state and future directions of teacher education.'

Research conducted by Martinez has helped us understand the uniqueness of the impact of what we contribute as teacher educators on each of our students. She points out that:

> Teacher education for some teachers is a powerful and significant watershed , providing them with confidence and competence to be active agents of construction in particular school settings. What the study also made clear was that there is no simple , linear connection between teacher education and beginning teachers' compliance or reconstruction. Rather teacher education appears as one of many crystals in a complex kaleidoscope representing the personal, institutional and social constructions of beginning teaching. (Martinez, 1992; 59-68)

The book Developing new and junior faculty edited by Sorcinelli & Austin (1992) provides a wide range of strategies to support faculty in their professional development. These include support with time management skills, leave, funding, mentoring and stress management. The ideas presented are valuable for us all in this period where we all need to be involved in some ongoing process of renewal.

Ken Eltis (1994: 62)in a recent article in the rejuvenated *Forum of Education* made a number of proposals aimed at the promotion of excellence in teaching and learning in schools. Among these was the proposal that:

> teacher educators need to create opportunities which will enable them to enhance their knowledge and understanding of current developments in schools so that they can improve the quality and relevance of their tertiary work and they can make a significant contribution to school programs.

Such a process does have its difficulties however. In 1988 Philps drew attention to this distance between teacher and teacher educator in discussing the notion of teacher educators returning to the school classroom as a continuing professional education strategy. He noted that

> Academics considering returning to the classroom for a brief period suspect that they will have to perform as paragons or be criticised by teachers. For their part, teachers seem to suspect that academics return to secretly evaluate what teachers do. (Philps 1988: 150)

Two similar obstacles have been found where attempts are made to use teachers as clinical faculty.

> One consists of the tensions between the school and university cultures. In addition to accepting each other's differences and trying to work across them, there seems to be conflicting movements both to convert the other and to justify one's position by the other's standards(eg, university professor arguing the practicality of her recommendations, the elementary teacher citing the research base for hers). Second, the pool of qualified teachers willing to take on more , and perhaps more challenging, work probably is limited. Additionally, where clinical faculty are sought by university teacher-education programs, there may be too few well-qualified candidates to go around. (Cornbleth & Ellsworth, 1994: 66)

These barriers or obstacles are ones of communication. What is urgently needed is for each of us to develop skills that support empathy, openness and the courage neede4d for authentic collaboration of a form outlined as qualities of an effective teacher by Arthur Combs as long ago as 1978.

Conclusion

As I started this paper I thought I had a clarity about what we need as teacher educators in the Australian context today. I am now less clear of what is needed but further advanced in my understanding of the complexity and essentially personal challenge that is here for us to accept, reject or once more ignore. What I am clear about is that effective teacher education means effective people working together, supporting each other's growth, understanding and uniqueness. It is not about initiatives of government, which, dressed up in the finery of quality assurance and accountability amount to an attack on innovation, on the development of exemplary programs, on quality and excellence (Koop & Bezzina, 1993: 98). It is about learning from, for example, initiatives in many schools that are achieving great things through opportunities provided by mandated change, taking them to heart and adapting them to our own context, culture and work.

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